

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck and Featherstone National Wildlife Refuges

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan is now available!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) is pleased to announce the release of the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Mason Neck Refuge) and Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge (Featherstone Refuge). We thank everyone who provided comments on our draft CCP/ Environmental Assessment (EA) released in January 2011. These comments provided us with valuable information for preparing our final document.

This CCP represents our 15-year management plan for both refuges. The plan furthers the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), provides direction to achieve both refuges' purposes, vision, and goals, and contributes to State and regional conservation plans. Implementing the plan will help us to fulfill both refuges' important role in conserving and managing wildlife resources.

How to Access the Final Plan

You may view or download the CCP from our Web site at http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/MasonNeck_Featherstone/ccphome.html.

You may also request a printed copy or CD-ROM version by contacting Potomac River Refuge Complex staff (see contact information on page 3).



American wigeon



Osprey - Tim Williams; Great Marsh on Mason Neck Refuge- Bill Wallen

Public Comments on the Draft Plan

We released the draft CCP/EA for public comment from January 5, 2011 to February 22, 2011. We also held three public meetings on February 2 and 3, 2011 in Woodbridge and Lorton, Virginia, respectively.

We greatly appreciate the level of public interest and involvement in our planning effort. We received 79 responses, both written and oral, during the public comment period.

These comments covered a variety of topics including shoreline protection, biological inventorying and monitoring, staffing and funding, public access, hunting, and other public use opportunities. These comments helped us improve the management objectives and strategies in the final CCP.

We evaluated all of the substantive comments received during the comment period, and include our responses to them as Appendix G, "Summary and Response to Public Comments," in the final CCP.

Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Mason Neck and Featherstone Refuges, along with Occoquan Bay Refuge, comprise the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Refuge Complex) with headquarters in Woodbridge, Virginia. The CCP for Occoquan Bay Refuge was previously completed.

Mason Neck Refuge was established in 1969 to protect the bald eagle. The refuge's 2,277 acres of forest, tidal marsh, and wetland habitat support a wide variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, marshbirds, landbirds, and other species of conservation concern.

Featherstone Refuge was established in 1979 to protect wetlands. The refuge's 325 acres of woodlands, tidal marsh, and forested riverine habitats support bald eagles, as well as wading and waterbirds, waterfowl, and other species of conservation concern.



Red-eyed vireo

Changes from the Draft to Final Plan

The final CCP is based on alternative B for, which we identified as the Service-preferred alternative for both refuges in the draft CCP/EA. In response to the comments we received on the draft CCP/EA, we made the following important modification:

- We will allow non-motorized boat landings at one designated area of Featherstone Refuge's shoreline to facilitate wildlife observation and nature photography. The designated landing site is a section of tidal beach along Farm Creek (refer to map 4.3 in the final CCP). Visitors arriving by non-motorized boat will be allowed to walk approximately 0.4 miles along an existing footpath (also indicated on map 4.3 in the final CCP). Until the rest of the refuge is officially opened, only this portion of footpath is open to the public.

In the final CCP, we also clarify our proposals to offer a spring youth turkey hunt at Mason Neck Refuge; expand Mason Neck Refuge's white-tailed deer hunt; evaluate opening Featherstone Refuge to hunting; and assess shoreline protection measures for both refuges.

We selected alternative B for both refuges, with the changes above, for several reasons. We believe they represent the array of management actions that best work towards achieving each refuge's purposes, vision, and goals, Refuge System policies, and the goals of other State and regional conservation plans. We also believe that these alternatives most effectively address the key issues raised during the planning process.

The full basis and rationale for our decision is documented in Appendix H, "Finding of No Significant Impact," of the final CCP.

Highlights of the Final Plan

Here is a brief summary of our planned management of the refuges. For more detailed information, please refer to the final CCP.

Mason Neck Refuge Goals

Goal 1: Protect, enhance, and restore the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of mature hardwood-mixed forests to support native wildlife and plant communities including species of conservation concern.

Goal 2: Protect, enhance, and restore the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of wetland habitats and shorelines to support native wildlife and plant communities including species of conservation concern.

Goal 3: Provide quality, compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities with particular emphasis on interpretation, wildlife observation, and photography.

Goal 4: Enhance efforts to promote public awareness, understanding, and support of the values of the refuge, the resources of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Mason Neck Refuge Management

Our habitat management program on Mason Neck Refuge will focus on protecting and enhancing the biological diversity, integrity, and health of tidal marsh and forested habitats to benefit bald eagles, waterfowl, forest-dependent migratory birds, and wading and waterbirds, such as great blue heron.



Red fox

Mason Neck Refuge Vision

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge is dedicated to the protection of the bald eagle and exemplifies the significant efforts, contributions, and successes of conservationists in Virginia. The refuge will continue to protect and enhance regionally important habitat for the bald eagle, migratory birds, and native wildlife and plant species along the tidal Potomac River. We will provide quality wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities, in particular wildlife viewing and photography. In cooperation with the other public agencies on the Mason Neck Peninsula, we will work to resolve resource issues in the area.



Bald eagle

We will also improve our program to treat invasive species, and expand our mapping, monitoring, and inventorying program to help measure our successes and inform future management decisions.

We will enhance our visitor services program by

- improving existing facilities;
- creating new trails;
- building new observation platforms; and
- offering a new youth turkey hunt, in addition to the current deer hunt.

Finally, we hope to increase the size of our Refuge Complex staff to help achieve our management goals and objectives for Mason Neck and Featherstone Refuges, as well as Occoquan Bay Refuge. In particular, we will pursue adding biological, visitor services, maintenance, and law enforcement positions.

Featherstone Refuge Goals

Goal 1: Protect forest, wetland, and shoreline habitats to support native wildlife and plant communities including species of concern.

Goal 2: Provide compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to increase the enjoyment and appreciation of the refuge's resources to visitors and nearby residents.

Goal 3: Promote awareness, understanding, and support of the values of the refuge, the resources of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Featherstone Refuge Vision

Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge provides valuable acres of 'wild woods and wetland' which are rapidly disappearing within this region of Northern Virginia. The refuge will continue to protect wetlands, bottomland hardwoods, and associated native wildlife and plants in an otherwise highly urbanized setting along the tidal Potomac River. Assuming access issues are resolved, the refuge will provide quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, in particular wildlife viewing, photography, and fishing.



Great blue heron

Tim Williams

Dave Fitzpatrick/USFWS



Painted turtle

Featherstone Refuge Management

Our biological and habitat management program priority for Featherstone Refuge is to monitor and protect sensitive areas from human disturbance, such as the refuge shoreline and riparian forest habitats.

Similar to Mason Neck Refuge, we will also monitor and control invasive plants, pests, and pathogens.

We will continue to pursue options with Prince William County and other stakeholders to secure public parking, and safe, legal public access, which would also facilitate establishing a segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail on the refuge.

Once we secure public access and funding is available, we will provide opportunities for wildlife observation and nature photography on designated refuge trails, and fishing at designated sites. Within 5 years, we also plan to evaluate a proposal to provide opportunities for hunting in cooperation with Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Implementing the Plan

We will immediately begin implementing projects outlined in the CCP. In order to be successful, we must continue to maintain and develop partnerships. We will continue to work with our volunteers, the Friends of Potomac River Refuges, the Mason Neck Managers Group, and other partners to achieve our vision and goals.

We encourage you to also stay involved during the plan's implementation. We also hope you will come visit us at the refuges!

Potomac River Refuge Complex Vision

The Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex provides exceptional forest, grassland, and wetland habitats for wildlife in a dynamic, highly urbanized region of Northern Virginia. We will maintain and enhance those quality habitats along the middle tidal Potomac River for native wildlife, particularly bald eagles and other species of conservation concern.

The proximity of the Refuge Complex to our Nation's capital provides unparalleled opportunities to demonstrate the importance of the natural world in enhancing the quality of human life, and to raise public awareness about the value of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Through outreach, education, and partnerships, we will foster stewardship of the living resources of the tidal Potomac River and relate their significance to the greater Chesapeake Bay watershed. Visitors will have diverse opportunities for quality, compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

Contact Information

To learn more about Mason Neck and Featherstone Refuges, please visit the refuges' Web sites at <http://www.fws.gov/masonneck/index.html> and <http://www.fws.gov/featherstone/index.html>.

You may reach Refuge Complex Headquarters by:
Telephone: 703/490-1479
Email: fw5rw_msnnr@fws.gov

Please send mail to:
Potomac River
National Wildlife Refuge Complex
14344 Jefferson Davis Highway
Woodbridge, VA 22191

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
NWRS - Refuge Planning
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, MA 01035

